



NOAA FISHERIES

Office of Protected Resources

One of the following criteria must be met for a marine mammal to be considered “stranded”

- *Dead, whether found on the beach or floating in the water.*
- *Alive on a beach but unable to return to the water.*
- *Alive on a beach and in need of apparent medical attention.*
- *Alive in the water and unable to return to its natural habitat without assistance.*

Additional Information

For additional details, please refer to the 2017 National Report of Marine Mammal Strandings in the United States.

Photo (top): X-ray imaging to document a hook ingestion of a by-caught false killer whale in Hawaii.
Photo: University of Hawaii Stranding Laboratory.



2017 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: Pacific Islands Region

The U.S. Marine Mammal Stranding Network is comprised of more than 100 organizations from the academic, wildlife rehabilitation, zoo/aquarium, museum, tribe, government, or local emergency response communities authorized to respond to cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) and pinnipeds (seals, and sea lions) that are sick, injured, in distress, or dead. These responses are authorized and overseen by NOAA Fisheries' Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

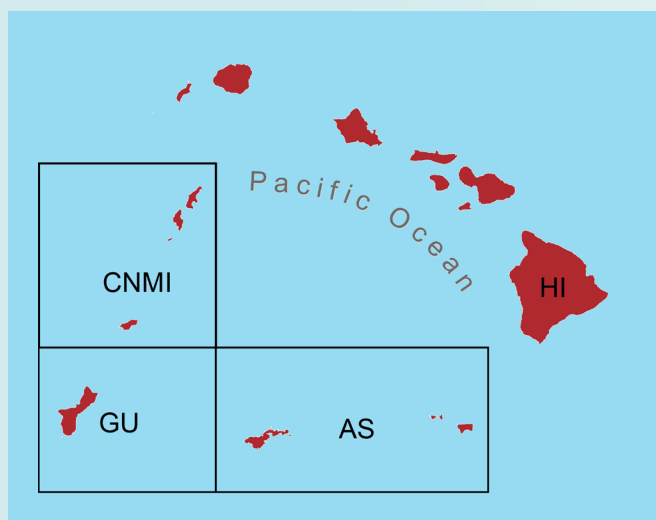


Figure PIR-1. NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region. Not pictured: the Pacific Remote Island Areas of Kingman Reef; Howland, Baker, Jarvis, and Wake Islands; and Johnston and Palmyra Atolls.

Pacific Islands Region

The NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region (PIR) encompasses approximately 1,494 miles of coastline around Hawaii (HI), Guam (GU), American Samoa (AS), and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI; Figure PIR-1). The region covers areas frequented by beachgoers (i.e., Main Hawaiian Islands), but also contains some very remote areas. The 52 confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Pacific Islands Region in 2017 is similar to its 11-year (2006-2016) average ($n=44 \pm 12$).

What Types of Marine Mammals Strand in the PIR?

At least 18 different species of marine mammals can be found in the waters of Hawaii, with the majority of stranding reports involving Hawaiian monk seals (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*), which are the only species of pinniped endemic to the Hawaiian archipelago (Figure PIR-2). The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the most endangered species of seal in the world with a population of around 1,400 individuals with about 300 animals in the Main Hawaiian Islands and 1,100 animals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. In 2017, all pinniped strandings reported in the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region were Hawaiian monk seals. Small cetacean species such as the spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*), short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), and melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*) also stranded in 2017 (Figure PIR-3). Large whale species such as humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*), fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*), and blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*) frequent the jurisdictional waters of the PIR, but large whale strandings are relatively rare in the region, with only four occurring in 2017 (humpback whale=3, sperm whale=1).

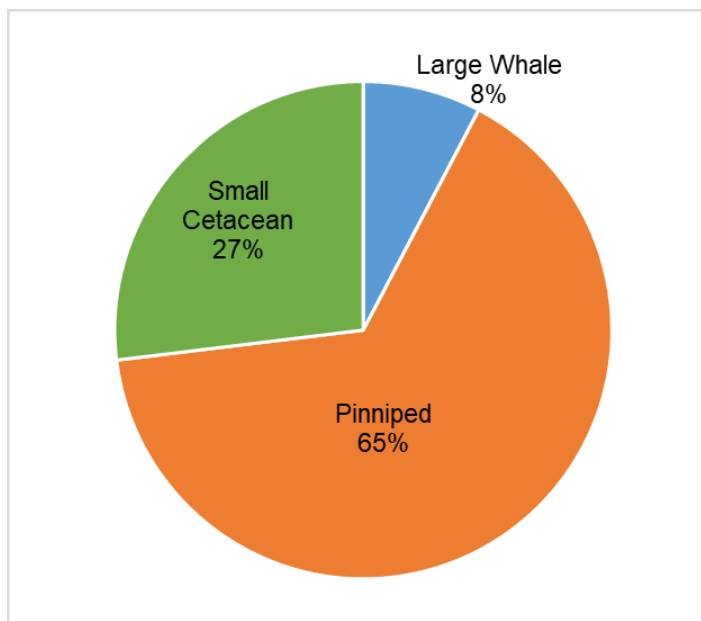


Figure PIR-2. Pacific Islands Region marine mammal strandings, 2017 (n=52).

Table PIR-1. Five most frequently stranded marine mammal species in the Pacific Islands Region.

Species	Confirmed Stranding Reports 2017	11-Year Average \pm Standard Deviation ¹ (2006-2016)
Hawaiian Monk Seal	34	19 \pm 9
Short-finned Pilot Whale	9	2 \pm 1
Spinner Dolphin	3	4 \pm 2
Humpback Whale	3	7 \pm 7
Melon-headed Whale	1	3 \pm 2

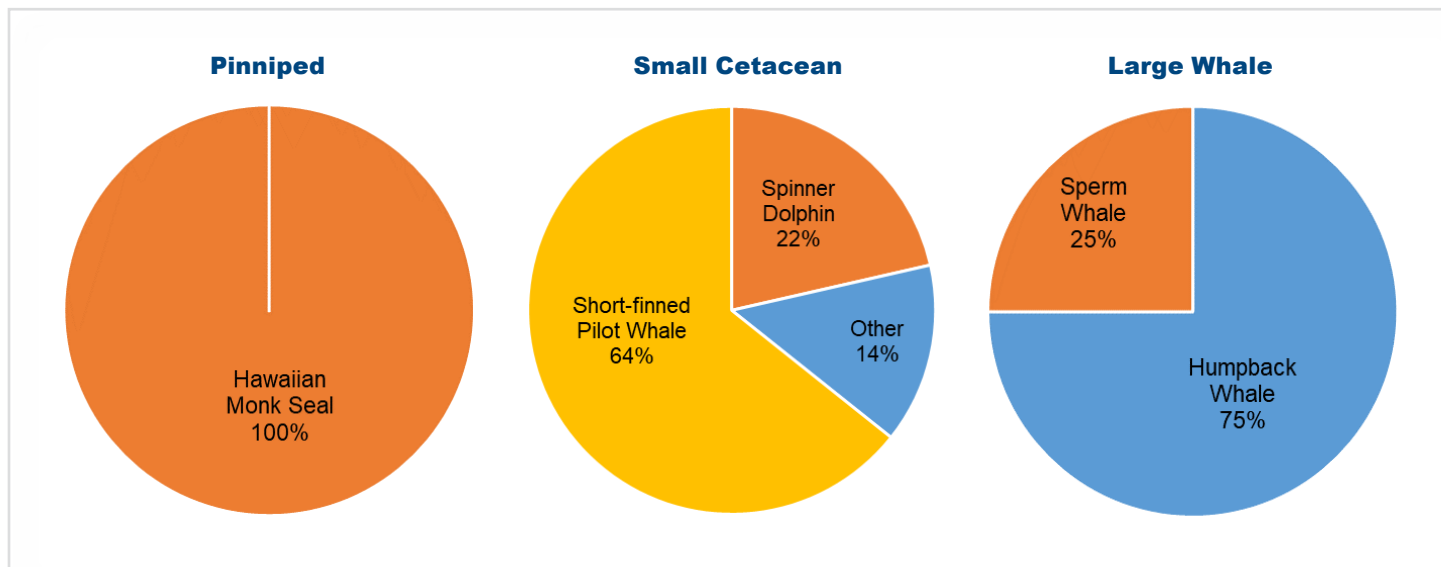


Figure PIR-3. Pacific Islands Region marine mammal strandings, by species, 2017 (n=52). Pinnipeds (n=34), small cetaceans (n=14), and large whales (n=4).

¹ A standard deviation is a measure used to quantify the amount of variation within a set of values.

Are Marine Mammals in the PIR Stranding Alive or Dead?

In 2017, the majority (65 percent) of marine mammal strandings reported in the Pacific Islands involved live animals (Figure PIR-4). Responses to Hawaiian monk seals often included animals accidentally hooked by fishing gear when attempting to consume bait. Interactions with fishing gear pose a serious danger to the seals, especially if the hooks are ingested. A handful of rescued seals were transported to Ke Kai Ola, which is the hospital and rehabilitation facility dedicated to Hawaiian monk seals administered by The Marine Mammal Center. Of the animals transferred to either the facilities at Ke Kai Ola on the Big Island or to the NOAA lab on Oahu in 2017 (n=6), 83 percent (n=5) were released. The network tries to gather as much information as they can from examining carcasses and live-stranded animals to better understand the species, as well as any population threats or pressures they may be facing.

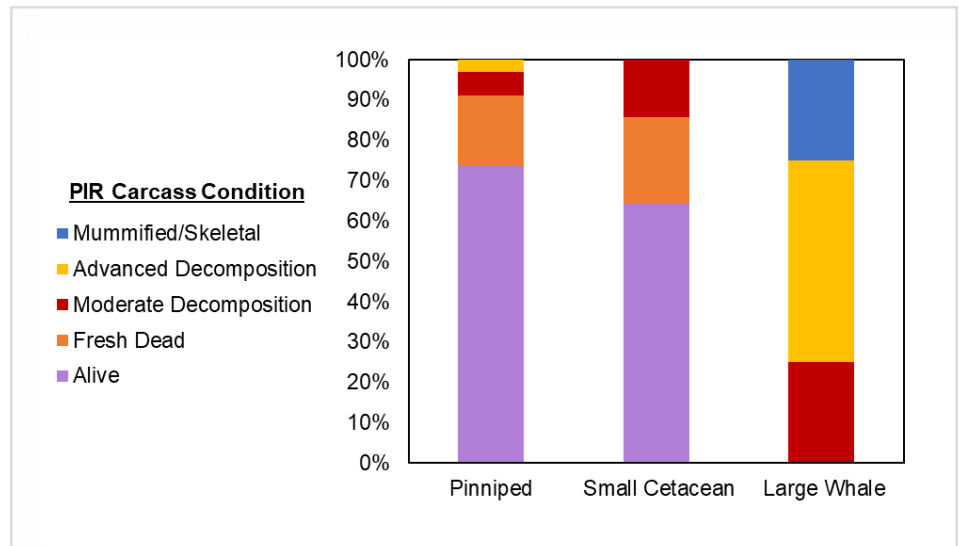


Figure PIR-4. Observation status of confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Pacific Islands Region, 2017.

When Did PIR Marine Mammals Strand in 2017?

Hawaiian monk seals stranded year-round in the Pacific Islands Region. The small spike in May (Figure PIR-5) is reflective of research cruises conducted around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands during that period, when seals suffering from malnutrition were rescued and brought into rehabilitation facilities. The Stranding Network also responded to cetacean strandings, although fewer in number. In October 2017, eight short-finned pilot whales mass stranded on Kalapaki Beach, Kauai. Cetaceans were typically spotted more frequently in the winter months, and therefore had a greater tendency to strand during that time. Humpback whales migrate to Hawaiian waters in the winter months to breed and calve, so their strandings occurred between November and May before they returned to their summer feeding grounds in Alaska.

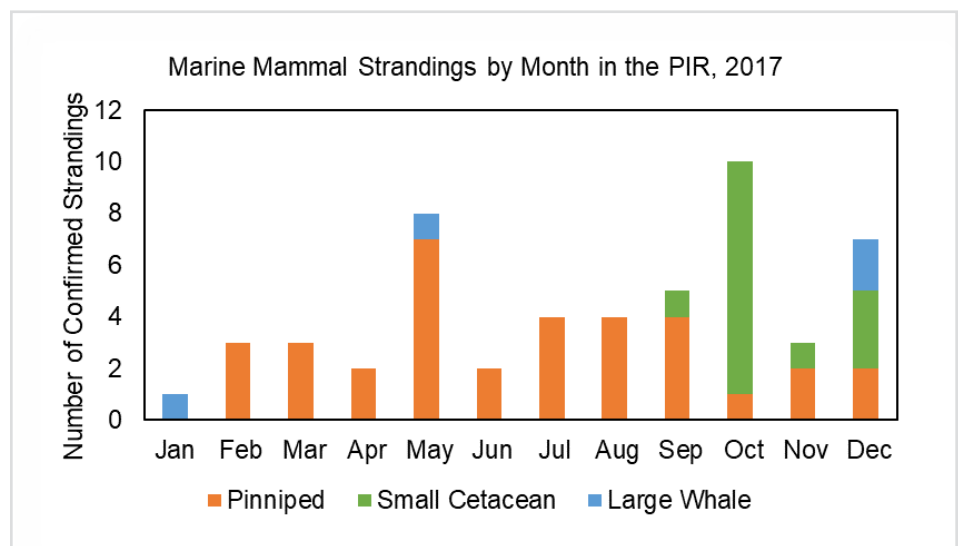


Figure PIR-5. Seasonality of marine mammal strandings in the Pacific Islands Region, 2017.

What Types of Unusual Mortality Events Were Occurring in the PIR?

UMEs in the PIR are relatively rare, and there were no new or open Unusual Mortality Event (UME) investigations underway in 2017. More information about UMEs is available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-unusual-mortality-events>.

What Can Members of the Public Do?



An endangered Hawaiian monk seal (photo taken under NOAA Fisheries Permit No. 932-1489). Photo: NOAA Fisheries/James Watt.

Pacific Islands Regional 24/7 Hotline

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program relies on reports of stranded marine mammals by the public. If you come across a stranded marine mammal please report it to your Pacific Islands regional 24/7 hotline.

Hotline: (888) 256-9840

Reporting a Stranding

The most important information to collect includes the:

- Date
- Location of stranding (including latitude and longitude)
- Number of animals
- Condition of the animal (alive or dead), and
- Species (if known)

Photos or videos (from a safe and legal distance) can also provide valuable information to network responders. Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal. You can also download the Dolphin & Whale 911 Stranding App in the Apple Store to help report a stranding.

Getting Involved

The National Stranding Network relies on government, private, and public support to conduct its vital work to save animals in distress and understand causes of injuries and mortalities. You can make a difference by contacting your local Stranding Network (list available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/report>) to see how you can get involved.

Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal.

Only confirmed stranding activities involving species under the jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries (cetaceans and pinnipeds, except walrus) are used in this report. All data were taken from the National Stranding Database and filtered accordingly. Any duplicate events, and entries of entangled large whales, were removed from the following analyses. All data and information described within this report are correct as of October 25, 2019. All photographs were taken under Stranding Agreement, Section 109(h) authority, or permit.



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